

Symposium

“A Connected Community Approach to building community-centred resilience in the face of shocks and chronic stressors in racialized/marginalized neighbourhoods”

“We must always speak of systemically induced vulnerability ... [Otherwise] we place the greatest burden for building resilience on those who have had to be insurmountably resilient and resistant for generations.” —Imara Rolston

Speakers

Dr. Blake Poland, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto;

Dr. Imara Rolston, Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit, City of Toronto, and Dalla Lana School of Public Health;

Mr. Isaaq Ahmed, Local Champions Network;

Ms. Anne Gloger, East Scarborough Storefront and Centre for Connected Communities

Key Takeaways

- Building **resilience** to climate change and other **shocks and stressors** is an integral part of healthy communities.
- Marginalized communities are often hit hardest during crises, and the **community role** in disaster response is crucial.
- A Connected Community Approach to resilience inverts the power relationship between historically marginalized communities and formal institutions. This approach places **equity and justice** at the centre.

What We Heard

Blake Poland

Opening remarks

- The Community Resilience Research Group recently studied community-building efforts in six racialized, low-income Toronto neighbourhoods before COVID-19, which helped community members during the pandemic. The group interviewed 46 grassroots leaders, held workshops and produced a podcast, Signal Boost.
- The project found that COVID-19 entrenched inequities in the six neighbourhoods studied. Although community-led innovations did exist—for example, the Parkdale Mutual Aid Network and Toronto Bike Brigade—they largely lacked support and funding.

What We Heard

“During COVID, food insecurity has been a huge concern.”

—Isaaq Ahmed

Imara Rolston

“Equity and resilience”

- During the development of the City of Toronto’s first Resilience Strategy, the City engaged grassroots leaders by hosting conferences and inviting local champions to contribute their perspectives.
- This wound up shifting the Strategy’s focus towards equity. Community leaders emphasized the need for civic restoration and intersectional justice, including racial and gender justice.
- Dr. Rolston told us cities need to transform civic decision-making processes—going beyond engagement of Indigenous, Black and racialized communities “to truly co-imagine and co-lead.”

Isaaq Ahmed

“Experience as a grassroots leader”

- A community leader and member of the Local Champions Network, Mr. Ahmed highlighted recent grassroots projects in his neighbourhood of Scarborough, Ontario.
- These projects include designing a new outdoor space for the neighbourhood, with a shared BBQ area, garden, running track and playground; providing free lunches and groceries during COVID-19 through a local food kitchen, 5n2; and creating a documentary, Project Susan: A Scarborough Story (2021).
- Mr. Ahmed emphasized the “huge need” for community organizing. But he also outlined barriers, such as competition for project funding and the personal funds and time required of grassroots organizers.

Anne Gloger

“Community resilience and the Connected Communities Approach”

- Ms. Gloger founded the Connected Community Approach. This framework “unlocks the potential of people, organizations and institutions to work together in addressing complex shocks and stressors” (Ms. Gloger).
- This approach isn’t just service coordination—rather, it helps people reimagine systems entirely. It puts equity at the forefront and prioritizes sharing power. The Connected Communities Approach recently helped pioneer the City of Toronto’s Theory of Change for Supporting Community-Based Resilience.

Explore
Further

Centre for Connected Communities (C3), connectedcommunities.ca

Community Climate Resilience Lab, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto